DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 566 CS 217 534

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TITLE Questions Often Asked about Promoting Lifetime Literacy Efforts.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Lifelong Learning; *Reading Motivation; *Recreational Reading; Student Development; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Lifelong Readers

ABSTRACT

Fostering the lifelong habit of reading is a vitally important goal that educators should embrace. When teaching and learning are connected to lifetime literacy efforts, students are in a better position to learn effectively and to develop the love of learning. Many teachers and administrators have demonstrated a keen interest in helping their students become not only proficient readers but also lifetime learners. This paper uses a question-and-answer dialogue to generate a rationale for supporting the lifetime reading habit in school. The paper discusses why lifetime literacy efforts are important; what is needed to encourage students to develop a love of reading; how teachers can motivate children to read for pleasure; how teachers can provide a balanced program that considers both lifetime literacy and skills instruction; how teachers can foster lifetime literacy in learners who are struggling with literacy; and what some of the obstacles are for educators working toward the goal of supporting lifetime literacy efforts. Contains 26 references. (NKA)

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ED 452 566

Questions Often Asked About Promoting Lifetime Literacy Efforts

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CS 217 534

Fostering the lifelong habit of reading is a vitally important goal that educators should embrace. When teaching and learning are connected to lifetime literacy efforts, students are in a better position to learn effectively and, as important, to develop the love of learning. This instructional direction is a large part of what I encourage in professional development sessions nationwide. Not surprisingly, teachers and administrators who attend these sessions have demonstrated a keen interest in helping their students become not only proficient readers but also lifetime learners. Their intent, however, is often tempered with a number of concerns that often dominate the typical school day, including preparing students for high-stakes testing, covering the required curriculum, and accommodating students' emotional and social issues caused by demographic trends.

What follows are questions concerning lifetime literacy efforts that are frequently asked by participants in my professional development sessions. Both the questions and the responses represent a blended scenario in which dedicated teachers and administrators are attempting to create a balanced perspective for students. Throughout this dialogue, I draw from related professional literature to strengthen a rationale for supporting the lifetime reading habit in school.

Q: Why are lifetime literacy efforts important?

Teachers who promote the lifetime reading habit increase the chances that children will not only become effective readers but also engage in reading for the rest of their lives. Becoming immersed in a diversity of "rich" resources provides children with opportunities to apply important strategies and skills to interesting, meaningful contexts. This immersion also helps developing readers, including those who are struggling with literacy, to experience different types of text structure, build content-specific and general-

world knowledge, increase reading fluency, gain a sense of ownership, improve reading achievement, and, of course, develop the lifetime reading habit (Greaney, 1980; Morrow, 1986; Morrow & Weinstein, 1984; Sanacore, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994). As children realize these and other dimensions of reading, they are more likely to develop confidence as readers and to consider reading as an important part of their lifestyles.

Q: What is needed for encouraging students to develop a love of reading?

The nucleus of lifetime literacy efforts is a well-stocked classroom library resource center. A wide variety of materials should be available, including poetry collections, short story anthologies, plays, novels, biographies, bibliotherapeutic stories, multicultural books, big books, little books, illustrated books, "how-to" manuals, large-print books, newspapers, magazines, comics, audiobooks, and computer software (Sanacore, 2000a, 2000b).

A special concern about the resources is that they represent a reasonable balance of different textual types, for example, poetic, descriptive, expository, and narrative. Many of the classroom library resource centers that I evaluate are top heavy with storybook materials, especially in primary-school settings. Although narrative books are important for developing fluency and story-grammar awareness, children also need exposure to informational resources. This exposure connects well with children's interest in nonfiction topics and also helps children make a smoother transition to content-area reading, which increases substantially through the grades (Sanacore, 1991, 1999). To support this positive direction, classroom library resource centers should consist of a better balance of genres, with up-to-date information trade books representing about one-fourth to one-half of the classroom materials collection (Moss, Leone, & Dipillo,1997).

Q: How can teachers motivate children to read for pleasure?

With a well-balanced collection of resources, the stage is set for teachers to organize blocks of time for pleasure reading. Typically, this time is called many things, including recreational reading, independent reading, voluntary reading, leisure reading, free reading, sustained silent reading, or DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). Children need opportunities to choose materials in which they are interested and to read them at their own comfortable rates. Meanwhile, teachers should also be reading for pleasure instead of grading papers or doing clerical work. Positive demonstrations of reading for pleasure send a clear message to children that this activity is to be valued and emulated by all members of the learning community.

Although I have visited many schools where classroom time is designated for pleasure reading, it usually takes place during literacy/English language arts instruction. Here, the use of time becomes an issue because if students sense that they are permitted to enjoy reading only in language arts, they are apt to limit their choice of reading materials. I urge classroom teachers to use blocks of time for incorporating "actual" reading across the curriculum. Children can read about dinosaurs in science, communities in social studies, and exercise and nutrition in health education. As students experience the pleasure of reading in different content areas, they expand their repertoire of interests as they engage in a diversity of text. Not surprisingly, they come to realize that reading is both enjoyable and informational.

Q: Promoting the joy of reading in different subject areas makes sense. What can teachers do to support this effort?

Besides providing a variety of resources and a block of time to read across the curriculum, teachers should read aloud to children at least once a day. Listening to fiction and nonfiction increases children's awareness of and interest in different topics and themes, text structures, language patterns, and specialized vocabulary. Children also learn the power of making predictions, and this interactive experience helps them focus on reading as a meaning-making process.

Books with patterned language—e.g., repetitive refrains and incremental refrains—help budding readers make predictions more easily. When these books are read aloud several times, young children have opportunities to join in during the refrains. Recently, I observed first grade children and their teacher sharing Audrey Wood's *The Napping House*. The children were extremely enthusiastic and responsive as they focused on the predictable language that the author used to build the incremental refrain: *wakeful flea, slumbering mouse, snoozing cat, dozing dog, dreaming child, snoring granny, cozy bed,* and *napping house*. According the teacher, whenever she connects read alouds and repetitive or incremental refrains, virtually all the children become actively involved. She elaborated, "Even my passive and nonresilient readers are interactive in this activity, probably because joining the group effort is less threatening than reading aloud as individuals." Not surprisingly, read alouds that encourage children's interactive responses build self-confidence and fluency, which are the foundation for meaning making and independent reading.

Q: Reading aloud is certainly a powerful and empowering literacy event. What else can teachers do to promote pleasure reading across the curriculum?

I like to complement read alouds with drama activities. At the least, students enjoy acting out parts of their favorite books. For example, pretending to be Atticus Finch in the courtroom of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* or demonstrating passion when reading excerpts from some of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches in James Haskins' *I Have a Dream: The Life and Words of Martin Luther King Jr.* are a sampling of the ways in which drama can foster a love of reading.

Another effective use of drama is readers' theater, which is easily applied to narrative and expository text. It also is well-matched with students' interests and needs, including multicultural perspectives, as it supports their fluency and meaning making. Readers' theater is particularly sensitive to children who are English language learners or whose native language is not English (Leu & Kinzer, 1999; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999; Sanacore, 2000a; Wolf, 1993).

Briefly described, readers' theater involves reading authentic literature, writing a short script of an exciting part in the literature, practicing the script with appropriate intonation and expression, experimenting with different ways of reading the script, and making decisions about roles for the readers' theater presentation (Leu & Kinzer, 1999). Depending on the comfort zones of the teachers, they may use a structured, teacher-directed, five-day format similar to the one suggested by Martinez et al. (1998/1999), or they may consider other approaches that provide more freedom for student choice.

During the 1999-2000 school year, I was invited to be a staff developer for an urbanized suburban school system consisting mostly of African American, Hispanic, and Haitian children. After conducting a needs assessment, my university colleagues and I worked closely with the teachers to address topics that they considered to be priorities.

One of the many topics we covered in the 48 workshops and follow-up classroom visitations was readers' theater. The teachers embraced this use of drama as an effective way of connecting reading, writing, listening, and speaking across the curriculum, and they were happy to learn and apply different approaches to using readers' theater with their children. In their reflective journals, a third grade teacher indicated that he helped his children to connect readers' theater to Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard's *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)*, while a fourth grade teacher elaborated on how she and her students followed a structured five-day format. Another approach was used by a fifth grade teacher who introduced readers' theater as one of many options for the weekly sharing session. These and other reflective journals indicated that readers' theater was integrated successfully in content area instruction and that both teachers and children enjoyed this use of drama (Sanacore, 2000a).

Q: How can teachers provide a balanced program that considers both lifetime literacy and skills instruction?

Reading for pleasure is an excellent context for applying important strategies and skills. As children read meaningful and interesting material that they selected, they experience a sense of ownership and commitment. Often, they are piqued emotionally and cognitively and therefore well-focused on their selection. This positive situation sets the stage for learning and applying phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and study skills. Whether the children encounter difficulties with these instructional areas or the teachers respond favorably to "teachable moments," the energy level is usually high enough to connect essential skills to meaningful learning.

Fortunately, common sense and the professional literature provide support for this connection. For example, with phonics instruction, Morrow (2001), Trachtenburg (1990), and Weaver ((1994) suggest practical approaches for using children's books to build sound-symbol relationships, such as consonants, vowels, digraphs, word families, and interesting sound elements. With vocabulary instruction, Nagy ((1988) argues in favor of extensive reading as a useful context that provides integration, repetition, and meaningful use of words. With comprehension instruction, Rosenblatt (1978, 1991) supports a balance of efferent and aesthetic stances, and Tompkins (1998) recommends that children learn about a topic through the use of Text Sets (informational sources, poems, and stories). I have observed that when children use Text Sets or Twin Texts (Camp, 2000), they usually increase their awareness of different textual patterns, and they enjoy opportunities to undertake different stances. These and other sources can help students and teachers meet their responsibilities concerning skills acquisition within the natural setting of reading, sharing, and learning.

Q: You have provided useful suggestions that are helpful for all children. How can teachers foster lifetime literacy in learners who are struggling with literacy?

Children who are at risk of failure deserve the same consideration as their peers who are not disabled. Often, modifications in the form of scaffolds give the necessary support. Scaffolding is "a set of prereading, during-reading, and post-reading opportunities and experiences designed to assist a particular group of students in successfully reading, understanding, learning from, and enjoying a particular selection" (Graves & Graves, 1994, p. 2). Last year, I observed fifth grade children selecting books from the classroom library resource center to be used for sustained silent reading. Several students chose

materials that seemed to be frustrating them. The teacher was acutely aware that stimulating the love of reading requires an emphasis on positive experiences with selecting, reading, and responding to books that are well-matched with children's interests and strengths. She therefore met with these children and guided them through the following six-step process suggested by Castle (1994, p. 159):

1. Pick a book you think you want to read.
2. Open to a page near the middle.
3. Read it to yourself.
4. Hold up a finger for any word you don't know.
5. If four fingers and a thumb are raised, the book may be too hard.
6. Try the same thing with another page. If it is still too hard, get another book.

Approaches like this increase the chances that readers who have difficulty with book selection will be matched with the "right" materials.

Other examples of scaffolding that support lifetime literacy include connecting reading to children's lives, activating and building their background knowledge, helping them to focus on different organizational patterns of text, and encouraging their responses to reading through journal writing (Graves & Graves, 1994). Although all literacy learners benefit from scaffolding, those who struggle with literacy must have this special source of support. Here, the major roles of classroom teachers are to treat children as whole individuals, determine the type of scaffolds that they need, demonstrate the use of these scaffolds, and provide enough guided practice until success is achieved.

Q: As educators work toward the goal of supporting lifetime literacy efforts, they probably will encounter obstacles. What are some of these obstacles?

The attitude of teachers, principals, and parents toward pleasure reading in school needs to be improved. Morrow's (1986) research findings suggest that these three groups consider the promotion of voluntary reading to be less important than word recognition, comprehension, and study skills. If Morrow conducted the same study today, her findings would probably be similar because educators are consumed with the stresses of high-stakes testing. Thus, many elementary and secondary school curricula have been realigned to accommodate the process and content of state-mandated tests, which are often used for grade-level promotion and retention, summer school enrollment, and graduation. Exacerbating this problem is media coverage of testing results, with many newspaper and broadcast journalists making unfair comparisons between and among schools. These stresses usually lead to an unnecessary emphasis on prepping for tests rather than on nurturing the lifetime reading habit. With no naivete intended, educators and parents need to support a balanced instructional program that not only accommodates testing requirements but also highlights lifetime literacy efforts. Without this big picture perspective, teachers and students will succumb to a "bits-and-pieces" approach to literacy learning, with its short-term successes and failures. To the contrary, our collective vision and mission should focus on supporting future generations of proficient readers who actually **want** to read for the rest of their lives.

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